

down there. We were watching it very carefully and getting all the feed-back. It seemed to be a rather short-lived operation too. It didn't take very long to settle that. That was mostly done over in the White House, too, at the top level.

Q: Did that mean that it lessened your responsibility for operations and readiness because it came direct from the White House?

Adm. R.: It took a great deal of the initiative right out of the hands of the Secretary of Defense and the Chief of Naval Operations. Yes, we had to bear the brunt of anything that went wrong from these top level decisions. We just had to stand-by and wait and see which way the ball was going to bounce and be ready to catch it no matter where it went. But fortunately, it turned out all right.

Q: This was your first experience with the new method of operations, direct from the White House to the ships at sea.

Adm. R.: That's right. It was about the first time.

Q: How did you react to that and what do you think of that as a system? How effective is it?

Adm. R.: Of course, we all abhorred the idea of this Bay of Pigs operation which was to put something like that into the hands of the CIA instead of the military. But I guess that's

Vice Admiral Lawson P. Ramage,
USN (Ret), interviewed by Dr. John T. Maguire, Jr.
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the way they wanted it. They figured they could run it. It was a rather surreptitious raid in there and it could be successful but the trouble is that the CIA has no backup on this thing. They had one shot and when it failed it was done. They exposed the whole thing, they had no way to follow up, and move on in and take advantage if they really wanted to do it.

Any military operation has got to have a lot of support behind it, a lot of power, because your first thrust is not going to keep you there unless you've got some immediate build-up behind it.

Q: That's a very simple lesson, isn't it, to learn or acquire?

Adm. R.: I know. I don't know how the thing got started. But nobody could realize how this thing got going and got as far as it did without the military being drawn into it. I'm sure that Admiral Burke was appalled when he got the word. It was too far down the track then to divert it or anything else. Everything was all laid on and everything was in motion. They'd almost left their base down there and were heading for Cuba before the full impact of this thing was exposed to the Pentagon.

Now the other thing, of course -- the missile crisis, the Cuban missile crisis. We were watching that day and night, the overflights and the Navy's reconnaissance that had all the pictures and all the other bonafide facts at hand that they confronted the Russians with. So this became more of a diplomatic thing. Of course, we started the blockade -- I forget

what they called it.

Q: Quarantine.

Adm. R.: Quarantine. They tried to find another term. -- they didn't want to use blockade which had a certain significance in international law so they came up with this quarantine term which, as far as I could see, was the same thing. But at least, had the Russians continued on to Cuba and not turned around, I don't know what would have happened. We would have been into that one on a short fuse.

Of course, at the time I think the President asked Army what they would need for an invasion into Cuba and they said they would need three more divisions and about six months to crank up. They weren't ready by a long shot. Nobody was ready to take on an operation like that, particularly if the Cubans had a lot of missiles to shoot back at us. It would have been a real debacle. I'm sure we would probably have been able to get over there and land some Marines or something on the beach. But actually when we checked with the Army to see what they wanted, what they required for such an operation, it was astronomical, about ten times what the Marines would have required.

We just didn't have the shipping. They didn't have the tanks or some carriers or whatever they needed. They wanted all kinds of things. And they wanted all of this material on the beach before they landed any men. It was ridiculous. That

was one thing we were very happy we didn't get involved in.

Q: Can you envision the time when there will be something of a shake-down of this new technique so that the military will have a greater voice in the direction and operations?

Adm. R.: I really don't see it. No. Because they have gotten so firmly entrenched in this civilian control for good or bad. And of course, we've had the perfect example of utter, complete breakdown in this thing in the Vietnam war. It just went on and on and it just got worse and worse. And the President himself had a hell of a time extricating the forces out there. But this was all because it was dictated straight from the White House to the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of Defense was calling the shots. I guess maybe the military was blamed some place. I would think probably in the case of the Army and certainly Westmoreland because all he kept doing was asking for more and more men and more and more buildup out there. This got us in deeper and deeper and deeper. But irrespective maybe he felt that required, maybe he felt that he did need that amount of support out there to carry out what directives he was getting from the White House and the Secretary of Defense. I probably would have done the same thing if I had been in his shoes, but it just seemed that every time you turned around he was asking for more troops and he got them. There was no question about it that once the civilian hierarchy got him into this thing then they continued to support him to that extent.